

Chapter I Purpose and need

Purpose and need

The Purpose and Need for the proposed amendment is to incorporate management direction that conserves and promotes recovery of the Canada lynx, by reducing or eliminating adverse effects from land management activities on national forest system and BLM lands, while preserving the overall multiple-use direction in existing plans.

Background

Canada lynx occupy habitat in Colorado, Idaho, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New York, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming – see Figure 1-2. In the western United States, lynx habitat is found primarily on federal lands.

Lynx inhabit moist coniferous forests that experience cold, snowy winters and provide a prey base of snowshoe hare. Lynx habitat is primarily found on moist sites that support subalpine fir, Engelmann spruce and lodgepole pine forests. In extreme northern Idaho and northwestern Montana, cedar-hemlock forests also are considered lynx habitat.

Lynx habitat is generally found at mid to upper elevations. The lower elevation ranges from 3,500 feet in the northern to

7,000 feet in the southern portions of the Northern Rockies lynx amendment area – see Figure 1-1, the amendment area map.

On July 8, 1998, the FWS (USDI Fish & Wildlife Service) proposed to list the Canada lynx as a threatened species under ESA (Endangered Species Act). The FS (USDA Forest Service) and BLM (USDI Bureau of Land Management) responded to the declining status of lynx in 1998 by establishing a team of international experts in lynx ecology to collect and summarize scientific data. This resulted in the publication *Ecology and Conservation of Lynx in the United States* (Ruggiero et al. 2000a).

Based on this information, an interagency team of government biologists developed the LCAS, *Lynx Conservation Assessment*

Background

and Strategy (Ruediger et al. 2000). The LCAS recommended conservation measures for federal lands in the contiguous United States. The conservation measures focus on managing vegetation within the historic range of variability, maintaining dense understory conditions for prey, minimizing snow compaction, and identifying and maintaining connectivity within and between habitat areas.

In December 1999, the FS and BLM prepared a BA, a *Biological Assessment*

recommendations in the LCAS before making any decisions about projects in lynx habitat. The FS also agreed not to authorize projects (except for 3rd party projects) likely to adversely affect lynx until a decision is made about changing existing plans. The agreements say any changes in long-term management direction will be made by amending or revising the existing plans.

In April of 2000, the FWS listed lynx as a threatened species (USDI FWS 2000b). In its Listing Decision, the FWS said,

The FWS listed lynx as threatened, effective April 24, 2000. The FWS had concluded that the chief threat to lynx in the contiguous United States was the lack of guidance in federal plans.

(Hickenbottom et al. 1999) of 57 NF (national forest) land and resource management plans and 56 BLM land use plans, the units with lynx habitat. The assessment found the existing plans were likely to adversely affect lynx because they did not contain direction to conserve lynx.

In February 2000, five FS Regional Foresters and four FWS Regional Directors signed a *Lynx Conservation Agreement* (USDA FS, USDI FWS 2000b) to promote the conservation of lynx and its habitat. In August 2000, the BLM Assistant Director for Renewable Resources and Planning and two FWS Regional Directors signed a similar agreement (USDI BLM, USDI FWS 2000). Both conservation agreements require the agencies to review and consider the

“ We conclude that the single factor threatening the contiguous United States distinct population segment of lynx is the lack of guidance for conservation of lynx and snowshoe hare habitat in National Forest Land and Resource Plans and BLM Land Use Plans.”

Formal consultation on existing plans required by ESA was completed on October 25, 2000, when the FWS issued its BO, *Biological Opinion* (USDI FWS 2000a). In the BO, the FWS said existing plans as applied together with the conservation agreements, were not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of lynx.

In March 2001, the FS and BLM developed schedules to amend or revise their existing plans – see Appendix D.

Background

In September 2001, the FS and BLM initiated the Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment, a proposal to amend existing plans for 22 units in the northern Rockies – see Figure 1-1.

In July 2003, the FWS issued a Notice of Remanded Determination of Status for the contiguous United States population of lynx (USDI FWS, 2003). In it, the FWS reaffirmed its decision to list the lynx as threatened, rather than endangered.

Many of the risk factors to lynx had not been identified at the time the existing plans were developed – the purpose and need of this amendment is to conserve lynx by addressing these risk factors as they apply to FS and BLM lands, by adding to or changing management direction.

Need for management direction

The LCAS identified risks to lynx and lynx habitat. The BA found many of the risk factors were not addressed in existing plans. Reducing or eliminating these risks is part of the Purpose and Need.

Risk factors affecting lynx productivity (*productivity* means the ability to continue to reproduce) include

- ♦ Timber management
- ♦ Wildland fire management
- ♦ Livestock grazing
- ♦ Recreational uses
- ♦ Forest backcountry roads and trails
- ♦ Other human developments

Lynx require certain habitat elements to persist in a given area, including foraging and denning habitat. *Foraging habitat* supports lynx primary prey, snowshoe hare, year-round. *Winter snowshoe hare habitat* occurs where many young trees or shrubs grow tall enough to protrude above the snow. This can happen in young regenerating forests that grow up after a disturbance, or in older forests with a substantial understory of shrubs and young trees. *Denning habitat* is found in areas with large amounts of woody debris, either down logs or root wads.

Activities like timber harvest, fire suppression and livestock grazing, can affect the amount, distribution and condition of lynx denning and winter snowshoe hare habitat.

Other predators may affect lynx. Lynx have developed a competitive advantage in places where deep, soft snow tends to

exclude other predators in mid-winter, the time when prey is most limiting.

Activities that result in providing access to other predators are also a potential risk. Such activities include winter recreation, the winter use of forest roads and trails and other human developments.

Risk factors affecting mortality include

- ♦ Trapping
- ♦ Shooting
- ♦ Predator control
- ♦ Highways
- ♦ Predation by other species

These factors can directly cause lynx deaths. Trapping is no longer allowed in the amendment area. Incidental or illegal shooting can occur, but is regulated by state agencies. Predator control activities are conducted by USDA Wildlife Services. These risk factors are not addressed in this DEIS (draft environmental impact statement) because decisions about them are outside the authority of the FS and BLM.

Highways are a known source of direct mortality.

Anything that increases the presence of predators also may contribute to indirect mortality.

Risk factors affecting movement

- ♦ Highways and associated development
- ♦ Private land development

Lynx are known to disperse over wide areas. Highways and the developments

Need for management direction

associated with them may impede lynx movement. The FS and BLM have only limited authority to address highways, and no authority to control what happens on private land.

The FWS decision to list lynx as threatened was based on a subset of these risks, which threaten the lynx population as a whole. Threats to lynx populations influenced by national forests and BLM land management include timber harvest regimes and fire suppression, as well as the lack of guidance to address these threats in existing plans. Lynx conservation and recovery requires that the plans address these threats.

Direction is needed to guide project-level decisions

- ♦ To avoid or reduce adverse effects from a spectrum of management activities; and
- ♦ To maintain or improve Canada lynx habitat.

To respond more quickly and consistently, management direction is considered for the planning area as a whole, rather than addressing each plan individually. The new management direction seeks to preserve the overall multiple-use direction in existing plans by avoiding making significant changes. Adjustments to individual plans may be considered as they are revised during the next several years.

Proposed action

In order to provide conservation and recovery of the Canada lynx the FS and the BLM propose to amend land and resource management plans for 18 NFs in Idaho, Montana, Utah, Washington and Wyoming, and land use plans for four BLM administrative units in Idaho and Utah. Collectively these will be referred to as “existing plans.” The FS is the lead agency responsible for preparing this amendment; Idaho and Utah BLM are cooperating agencies.

The FWS’s *Lynx Biological Opinion* concluded

...if Plans are amended or revised incorporating conservation measures in the LCAS or the equivalent thereof...the Plans would likely not jeopardize the continued existence of lynx.

The original Proposed Action was based on conservation measures recommended in the LCAS as a way to achieve lynx conservation. Measures from the LCAS were reorganized and rearranged to make it easier to include them in the existing plans. Every effort was made to preserve the intent of the measures in the LCAS.

The original Proposed Action is now Alternative B and has changed somewhat from how it was described in the fall of

2001 when the agencies asked for public comments on the scope of the proposal. It was rewritten to provide clearer management direction by organizing it better and eliminating duplication. Appendix A is a crosswalk between the LCAS, the scoping version of the proposed action and the DEIS Proposed Action, Alternative B.

Throughout this document, references to the Proposed Action mean Alternative B, the DEIS Proposed Action.

The Proposed Action is an amendment that would add or modify management direction in existing plans and would consist of one or more of the following:

- ♦ *Goals*, which are general descriptions of desired results;
- ♦ *Objectives*, which are descriptions of desired resource conditions;
- ♦ *Standards*, which are management requirements designed to meet the objectives; and
- ♦ *Guidelines*, management actions normally taken to meet the objectives.

The existing plans contain general resource management direction. Plans do not compel management activities to occur. Whether goals and objectives are achieved depends on agency budgets and

Alternative B, the Proposed Action, has changed from how it was described during scoping. It was rewritten to provide clearer management direction by organizing it better and eliminating duplication.

competing priorities. Standards may prohibit some management activities from occurring; however, standards can be changed through subsequent plan amendment or revision. Guidelines are recommendations, and following them is discretionary; however, documentation of reasons for not following them may be required. (The term “guidelines” is not defined in the current planning regulations, and is not used in the 2002 proposed planning regulations.)

This amendment is limited in scope. It’s not intended to and does not encompass all the issues or resource needs that may be considered when plans are revised. The amendment adds only those goals, objectives, standards and guidelines relating to specific lynx habitat risk factors. The amendment would not change the land-use allocations in existing plans.

The amendment applies only to lynx habitat in LAUs (lynx analysis unit – see the *Lynx* section in Chapter 3), or to lynx linkage areas identified based on local information at the time a project is proposed.

The amendment does not make a decision about what lynx habitat is or where linkage-area boundaries are, or how they are identified.

Lynx habitat and linkage areas used in this analysis are based on the best current inventory information currently available at this scale – see Figure 1-1 displaying lynx habitat and linkage areas. This information has been compiled under the guidance of the Interagency Lynx and Wolverine Steering Committee. See Appendix B for a description of how the maps used for analysis and the DEIS were prepared; see the *List of Preparers* for a description of the Committee and its role.

The Proposed Action considers information from the following sources:

- ♦ *Ecology and Conservation of Lynx in the United States* (Ruggiero et al. 2000a)
- ♦ *LCAS, Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy* (Ruediger et al. 2000)
- ♦ *FWS’s Final Listing Rule, Federal Register*, Vol. 65, No. 58, 16051-16086 (USDI FWS 2000b)
- ♦ *FS and BLM’s BA, Biological Assessment of the Effects of National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans and Bureau of Land Management Land Use Plans on Canada Lynx* (Hickenbottom et al. 1999)
- ♦ *FWS’s BO, Lynx Biological Opinion* (USDI FWS 2000a)

These documents present a summary of scientific knowledge on issues relevant to lynx conservation, and are available on-line at www.fs.fed.us/r1/planning/lynx.html.

Administrative units included in the amendment

The LCAS identifies five geographic areas that provide habitat for lynx in the United States – see Figure 1-2 on the following page. Each geographic area has unique ecosystems and management histories. This amendment will apply to lands located within the Northern Rocky Mountains Geographic Area. This geographic area encompasses lands in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

Eighteen national forests in FS regions 1, 2 and 4, and four BLM units in Idaho and

Utah, are part of this amendment – see Table 1-1.

The federal lands affected by this amendment include lynx habitat and linkage areas inside these units, and are referred to as the amendment area. The number of plans affected by this amendment is different from the number of units affected, because some units have been consolidated. Units and plans affected by this amendment are:

Table 1-1. Administrative units and plans that would be amended

Forest Service		
Idaho national forest units	FS region	Land and resource management plan
Clearwater	1	Clearwater forest plan
Idaho Panhandle	1	Idaho Panhandle forest plan
Nez Perce	1	Nez Perce forest plan
Salmon-Challis	4	Salmon forest plan
	4	Challis forest plan
Caribou-Targhee	4	Targhee forest plan
Montana national forest units	FS region	
Beaverhead-Deerlodge	1	Beaverhead forest plan
	1	Deerlodge forest plan
Bitterroot	1	Bitterroot forest plan
Custer	1	Custer forest plan
Flathead	1	Flathead forest plan
Gallatin	1	Gallatin forest plan
Helena	1	Helena forest plan
Kootenai	1	Kootenai forest plan
Lewis and Clark	1	Lewis and Clark forest plan
Lolo	1	Lolo forest plan
Utah national forest units	FS region	
Ashley	4	Ashley forest plan
Wyoming national forest units	FS region	
Bighorn	2	Bighorn forest plan
Bridger-Teton	4	Bridger-Teton forest plan
Shoshone	2	Shoshone forest plan

Administrative units

Bureau of Land Management		
Idaho districts	BLM field office	Land use plan
Lower Snake River	Four River	Cascade resource management plan
	Salmon	Lemhi resource management plan
	Challis	Challis resource management plan
	Coeur d'Alene	Emerald Empire management framework plan
	Cottonwood	
Upper Columbia/ Salmon/Clearwater	Idaho Falls	Chief Joseph management framework plan
	Idaho Falls	Medicine Lodge MFP
Upper Snake River	Pocatello †	Pocatello resource management plan †
	Shoshone	Sun Valley management framework plan
Utah field office		
Salt Lake City	†	Randolph management framework plan †

†These units have no lynx habitat, so only the linkage direction in the proposed amendment applies

Figure I-2. US lynx geographic areas



Administrative units

Not all the FS and BLM units inside the Northern Rockies geographic area are included in this amendment. Existing plans for eleven national forests in the geographic area will not be changed by this amendment. These include:

- ♦ In Region 4, the Payette, Boise, Sawtooth, Caribou, Wasatch-Cache and Unita NFs, which have nearly completed revising their plans. Information from this amendment has been used in developing those plans.
- ♦ In Region 6, the Colville, Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, Malheur and Ochoco NFs, which will address lynx through later planning efforts.

The BLM units included in this amendment are limited to those in Idaho and northwest Utah. BLM units in Montana and Wyoming, and the

remainder of Utah, will address lynx as needed in separate processes and are not part of this proposal.

The revision schedule in Appendix D shows the tentative timetable for other planning efforts. Once this amendment is in place, individual plans may be amended or revised as needed to respond to new information, local conditions or to comply with revision schedules.

- ♦ Nineteen of the 20 forest plans that would be amended by this decision will probably be revised within the next few years – the Targhee NF revised its plan in 1999.
- ♦ The BLM has recently started revising and replacing existing plans, and anticipates that all out-of-date plans will be replaced within the next few years.

Scope

“*Scope*” is defined in 40 CFR 1508.25 as the range of actions, alternatives and impacts to be considered in an environmental analysis. The Proposed Action and its alternatives consist of goals, objectives, standards and guidelines. The DEIS addresses their effects.

To determine the scope of an environmental impact statement, agencies consider three kinds of alternatives, three kinds of impacts and three kinds of actions, namely, connected, cumulative and similar actions.

Alternatives considered

The analysis evaluates three types of alternatives, including

- ♦ The no-action alternative, Alternative A;
- ♦ The Proposed Action, Alternative B; and
- ♦ Other reasonable courses of action, Alternatives C, D and E.

Alternatives C, D and E also include measures that address primary issues.

Impacts considered

Three kinds of environmental impacts are possible, direct, indirect and cumulative.

Direct effects are those that occur at the same time and place as the amendment. There are no direct environmental consequences of the amendment. The amendment is programmatic in nature, consisting of direction that would be

applied to future management activities. It does not prescribe site-specific activities on the ground. Direct effects would be disclosed later at the project level, when site-specific decisions were made.

This analysis evaluates the *indirect* and *cumulative effects* of the Proposed Action and alternatives.

Actions considered

Connected actions

Connected actions are closely related actions that:

- ♦ Automatically trigger other actions;
- ♦ Cannot or will not proceed unless other actions are taken previously or simultaneously; or
- ♦ Are interdependent parts of a larger action and depend on that larger action for their justification.

The Proposed Action includes the management direction needed to fulfill the identified Purpose and Need.

Other planning efforts are underway to address lynx management in other places, such as the proposed amendment for national forests in the Southern Rockies geographic area (USDA FS 2000a). These actions are not considered connected because:

- ♦ Each plan can stand on its own;
- ♦ The areas have different ecosystems and management histories; and
- ♦ The decisions can be made independently under NFMA.

Cumulative actions

Cumulative actions are those which, when viewed with past, other present and reasonably foreseeable actions, may have cumulatively significant impacts and should be discussed in the same environmental analysis.

Other programmatic actions on BLM, FS, other federal, tribal, state and private lands have been evaluated where information is available to determine the cumulative effects. This analysis is described in Chapter 3 and Appendix L.

Similar actions

Similar actions are those that have similar timing or are geographically close to the Proposed Action. These actions may be considered in the same environmental analysis as the Proposed Action and its alternatives.

The Southern Rockies Lynx Amendment effort is underway in Colorado. However, that effort is not included with this one because of differing ecosystems and management histories.

Legal background

The following laws and regulations apply to all the resources analyzed. Others apply only to a specific resource area, and are described in Chapter 3 in the section about that resource.

Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act

The Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act says the national forests are established and shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed and wildlife and fish purposes.

NFMA

The National Forest Management Act and 36 CFR 219 provides direction to the FS about developing, maintaining and revising land and resource management plans. NFMA says plans must provide a sustained yield of goods and services and provide for multiple uses, in a way that will both maximize long-term net public benefits and be environmentally sound.

FLPMA

Federal Land Plan Management Act and 43 CFR 1601 and 1610 provide direction and establish a process for developing, approving, maintaining, amending and revising resource management plans, and using existing plans for public lands administered by the BLM. In FLPMA Congress declared the policy of the United States was to manage public land based on multiple use and sustained yield unless otherwise specified by law.

ESA

The Endangered Species Act and 50 CFR 402 apply to federal lands and direct federal agencies to use their authorities to carry out conservation programs for listed species. ESA directs federal agencies to make sure their actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species, or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

The Canada lynx is listed as a threatened species, and is the focus of this proposed management direction. No critical habitat has been identified for the Canada lynx to date.

Decision framework

The DEIS is being prepared to evaluate the effects of the Proposed Action, and to look at alternative ways of achieving the Purpose and Need, while responding to the *primary issues* described in Chapter 2.

The responsible officials will decide whether or not to amend FS and BLM plans to incorporate direction for lynx conservation and recovery, and if so what that direction would contain.

Due to agency-specific planning regulations, the BLM and FS will publish separate decision documents for their respective amendments.

Responsible officials

Kathleen McAllister, Deputy Regional Forester for the Northern Region, has been

directing the preparation of the DEIS. The responsible officials are:

- ♦ Brad Powell, Regional Forester, Northern Region, Region 1, PO Box 7669, Missoula, Montana 59807;
- ♦ Rick Cables, Regional Forester, Rocky Mountain Region, Region 2, PO Box 25127, Lakewood CO, 80225;
- ♦ Jack Troyer, Regional Forester, Intermountain Region, Region 4, Federal Building, 324 25th Street, Ogden, UT 84401;
- ♦ K. Lynn Bennett, State Director for Idaho BLM, 1387 South Vinnell Way, Boise, ID 83709; and
- ♦ Sally Wisely; State Director for Utah BLM, 324 South State Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84145.

How information is presented

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 explains and describes the *Purpose and Need* for the proposed amendment and the scope of the decision.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 presents *primary issues* and *management concerns* identified during scoping. Then it describes alternatives to the Proposed Action that respond to the primary issues and management concerns.

Chapter 2 also describes alternatives not considered in detail, and other concerns that did not lead to alternatives.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 presents the *affected environment* and the *environmental effects* of the alternatives.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 includes a list of who prepared this document and a list of agencies and groups contacted.

Supporting information

Supporting information, including a glossary of terms and a bibliography of references, follow Chapter 4.

Appendixes

The appendices contain more detailed information used in the effects analysis and are frequently referenced in the text.

The project record

The Project Record is referenced throughout this document. It includes the information used for analysis, made available to the responsible officials. Information will continue to be added to the Project Record as the NEPA process continues.

On request, information from this file can be provided or made available for review – contact the Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment, Regional Forester’s Office, P.O. Box 7669, Missoula, Montana 59807. Much information is available on-line at www.fs.fed.us/r1/planning/lynx.html.
